

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
SUMMER COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY
JAY SMITH, PUBLISHER
THE ATLANTA JOURNAL
THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

AUGUST 31, 1989

SEVENTY-TWO COMMENCEMENTS AGO THE CLASS OF 1971 FILED OUT OF OHIO STADIUM.

AS THE VANGUARD OF THE SO-CALLED "BABY BOOM" GENERATION, OUR FUTURES APPEARED BOUNDLESS. LIFE HAD COME EASILY FOR MOST OF US, TOO EASILY, PERHAPS.

WE GREW UP IN AN OHIO THAT KNEW EACH YEAR WOULD BE BETTER THAN THE ONE BEFORE IT. MANUFACTURING WAS KING. PERPETUAL PROSPERITY SEEMED ASSURED.

THAT DREAM ENDED --- SOME WOULD SAY IT SHATTERED --- NOT TOO LONG AFTER WE MARCHED OUT OF THE STADIUM.

AS A RESULT, WE LEARNED SOMETHING ABOUT OURSELVES. WE LEARNED THAT AS THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF AUTOMOTIVE ASSEMBLERS, TOOL AND DIE MAKERS, STEELWORKERS AND FARMERS WE WERE STILL OHIOANS.

AND THAT WAS GOOD. IT MAY HAVE BEEN OUR SALVATION. OHIOANS BUILT THIS STATE. OHIOANS WOULD FIGHT TO KEEP IT GOING.

I COME TODAY NOT TO RECOUNT THE LAST TWO DECADES, NOR TO GET NOSTALGIC OVER THE TIMES IN WHICH WE GREW UP. TIMES ARE TIMES.

RATHER, I COME TO SHARE THE NEWS THAT AN EXCITING BUT UNCERTAIN WORLD AWAITS YOU. IT'S AN INVIGORATING AND CHALLENGING WORLD. IT'S THE SAME, GREAT, SELF-LEVELING WORLD THAT CONTINUES TO MOLD US INTO THE PRODUCTIVE PEOPLE OUR LOVED ONES AND THIS UNIVERSITY HOPED THAT WE WOULD ALWAYS BECOME.

THOSE OF US GATHERED HERE TODAY HAVE TWO SPECIAL ADVANTAGES: FIRST, WE ARE OHIOANS; SECOND, WE ARE --- OR WILL BE IN A MATTER OF MOMENTS --- GRADUATES OF OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.

COMING HOME TO ADDRESS THE SUMMER QUARTER GRADUATING CLASS OF 1989 IS A HUMBLING HONOR. INVITATIONS SUCH AS THESE, IT SEEMS, USUALLY COME FROM THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW YOU WELL. IF THEY KNEW YOU BETTER, THEY'D PROBABLY NEVER ASK. STANDING BEFORE YOU TODAY IS AKIN TO BEING ASKED BY YOUR FAMILY, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT SOME TRULY IMPORTANT MATTER. THAT THEY WOULD ASK IS SPECIAL ENOUGH. NOW, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE ADVICE MATTER. I'LL TRY NOT TO LET YOU DOWN. I'LL ALSO TRY TO BE BRIEF. THE LAST THING ANY OF US NEEDS ON THIS SPECIAL DAY IS A LONG-WINDED ORATION BY A KNOW-IT-ALL.

PERMIT ME TO RETURN TO THAT WORLD THAT AWAITS EACH OF US WHO HAS PERSPIRED BENEATH CAP AND GOWN IN ANTICIPATION OF RECEIVING A DIPLOMA.

FULL OF SELF-CONFIDENCE WE ENTER OUR FIRST FULL-TIME JOB. SOME OF US CONTINUE OUR STUDIES. OR, LIKE SOME MANY TODAY, WE RETURN TO WORK-ADAY LIVES WITH THE SATISFACTION OF AN ACADEMIC CREDENTIAL BEHIND OUR NAMES.

REST ASSURED, HOWEVER, THAT WHILE THOSE AROUND YOU WILL BE DELIGHTED FOR YOUR GOOD FORTUNE THEY WON'T BE TERRIBLY IMPRESSED. FOR THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE. YOU'LL BE JUDGED, IN PART, BY THE SKILLS YOU BRING TO THE JOB. MORE LIKELY, YOU'LL BE JUDGED BY THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE.

I REMAIN CONVINCED THAT MOST FOLKS ARE DECENT AND HARD WORKING. THEY ONLY WANT TO DO A JOB WELL AND TO BE RECOGNIZED --- USUALLY QUIETLY --- FOR IT.

THAT'S NOT TO SAY THAT GOOD, PERHAPS EVEN GREAT, THINGS WON'T COME YOUR WAY. MY DEAR FRIEND AND TEACHER, ARNOLD ROSENFELD, NOW EDITOR OF COX NEWSPAPERS IMPARTED THIS WISDOM NOT TOO LONG AFTER HIRING ME AS AN INEXPERIENCED REPORTER ONTO HIS STAFF AT THE DAYTON DAILY NEWS. ARNOLD REMINDED ME ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION THAT I OUGHT TO WORRY ONLY ABOUT THE JOB I WAS DOING AT THE TIME.

"WHEN YOU REALLY WANT SOMETHING," ARNOLD SAID, "YOU'LL PROBABLY NEVER GET IT. KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN. DO YOUR JOB WELL. WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT, SOMEONE WILL TAP YOU ON THE SHOULDER AND ASK IF YOU ARE READY FOR MORE."

I'VE NEVER KNOWN THAT ADVICE TO FAIL.

THE ONLY OTHER PERFECT PIECE OF ADVICE I CAN RECALL CAME FROM MY LATE FATHER, WHO TOLD ME BEFORE I STARTED EACH NEW JOB: "KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT AND YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN. YOU JUST MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING."

THAT YOU ARE HERE TODAY IS EVIDENCE THAT YOU'VE PASSED YOUR APPRENTICESHIP AND ARE READY FOR THE NEXT STEP. YET, AS IN A TRADE, APPRENTICESHIP

IS NO GUARANTEE OF THE KIND OF JOURNEYMAN YOU WILL BECOME.

YOU AND YOU ALONE WILL DETERMINE THAT.

WITH APOLOGIES TO MASLOW, I HAVE TRIED TO LIVE BY A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT HIERARCHY OF NEEDS. IT'S NOT ORIGINAL WITH ME, SO IF IT DOESN'T WORK, PLEASE HOLD ME ONLY PARTLY TO BLAME.

AT THE RISK OF SOUNDING SELF-CENTERED, I BELIEVE A PERSON'S HIGHEST NEED HAS TO BE FOR SELF. LET ME EXPLAIN. UNLESS YOU ARE AT PEACE WITH YOURSELF, IT'S DOUBTFUL THAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GO TO BATTLE FOR THE CAUSES THAT TRULY MATTER. UNLESS YOU ARE HEALTHY --- PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY --- IT'S DOUBTFUL THAT YOU'LL LAST VERY LONG IN THAT ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE WORLD THAT AWAITS. I HOPE YOU GET MY POINT. YOUR HIGHEST PRIORITY HAS TO BE YOURSELF. OTHERWISE, YOUR WORTH TO OTHERS IS GREATLY DEPRECIATED.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS MUST COME NEXT. LOOK AROUND YOU AND THE CHANCES ARE GOOD THAT SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THE WORLD ARE WITH YOU TODAY. KNOW THAT THEY LOVE YOU. BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE SACRIFICED UNSPEAKABLY FOR YOU. DO THE SAME FOR THEM. WHATEVER I HAVE IN LIFE, WHATEVER I BECOME, I OWE MOSTLY TO MY WIFE, SUSAN, OUR THREE CHILDREN, MY PARENTS, THE REST TO OUR FAMILY AND A HANDFUL OF DEAR FRIENDS.

BECAUSE I BELIEVE WE ALL HAVE SOME MISSION IN LIFE, WORK AND CAREER FOLLOW. SO MUCH OF WHO WE ARE IS DEFINED BY WHAT WE DO. THEREFORE, THE WAY WE DO IT OUGHT TO BE NOTHING LESS THAN THE BEST. WORK, IN

A REAL SENSE, OUGHT TO BE PLAY. IT SHOULD BE SOMETHING WE WAKE EACH MORNING EAGER TO EXPLORE. THAT'S NOT TO SAY IT WILL ALWAYS BE WELCOME. I RECALL MORE THAN ONE MORNING WHEN I'VE DREADED WHAT WAS AHEAD. BUT I CAN'T RECALL A SINGLE MORNING WHEN I DIDN'T LOOK FORWARD TO DISCOVERING HOW IT WOULD TURN OUT. I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT IN THIS AGE OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT TO NOTE THAT UNDER SMITH'S HIERARCHY WORK COMES THIRD --- BEHIND SELF AND FAMILY. I'VE NEVER MET A PRODUCTIVE WORKER WITH AN UNPRODUCTIVE SENSE OF SELF AND FAMILY.

WITH SELF, FAMILY AND WORK IN ORDER IT'S ESSENTIAL THAT WE INVEST SOMETHING IN COMMUNITY. FROM COACHING A KID'S SOCCER TEAM TO TEACHING AN ILLITERATE ADULT TO READ, THERE IS AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF WAYS WE CAN HELP. I'VE LIVED IN SOME PLACES WHERE THIS VALUE WAS NOT AS DEEPLY IMBEDDED AS IT IS IN THE MIDWEST. IT PLEASES ME GREATLY, FOR INSTANCE, WHEN I DISCOVER THAT FIVE OF THE TOP TEN CITIES FOR PER CAPITA UNITED WAY GIVING ARE RIGHT HERE IN OHIO. THERE'S REAL TRUTH IN THE SAW THAT A COMMUNITY IS ONLY AS STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST LINK.

IF I HAVE SOUNDED LIKE AN UNABASHED POLYANNA I MAKE NO APOLOGIES FOR IT. AS A JOURNALIST I'VE SEEN ENOUGH SUFFERING AND MISERY TO LAST A CYNIC'S LIFETIME. MUCH OF IT WE PRINT ON OUR FRONT PAGES EVERY DAY.

BUT, I'M PLEASED TO REPORT, I'VE SEEN AN EQUAL AMOUNT OF MAN'S AND WOMAN'S ACCOMPLISHMENT. AND, I'M ALSO PLEASED TO REPORT, MORE AND MORE OF THAT IS FINDING ITS WAY ONTO OUR FRONT PAGES, TOO.

OF THE TWO, I GREATLY PREFER THE TALES OF ACCOMPLISHMENT, ALTHOUGH I THINK WE MUST CONTINUE TO FOCUS OUR SOCIETAL AGENDA ON THAT WHICH NEEDS FIXING.

THERE'S NOTHING TERRIBLY PROFOUND, I RECOGNIZE, IN WHAT I'VE HAD TO SAY.

FOR THESE ARE THE VALUES SHAPED DURING A LIFE MOSTLY SPENT IN OHIO. FROM THE WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD OF CINCINNATI, WHERE I GREW UP, TO FOUR EXCITING YEARS SPENT ON THIS CAMPUS TO A DOZEN YEARS SPENT LEARNING IN DAYTON THE CAREER I NOW PURSUE, THE FUNDAMENTALS FOR ME CAME FROM FELLOW OHIOANS.

PERHAPS IT'S MY IMAGINATION, BUT HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THAT WHEN MADISON AVENUE LAUNCHES YET ANOTHER CAMPAIGN OF "WHAT'S-RIGHT-ABOUT-AMERICA?" THE IMAGES IT USES SEEM TO BE RIGHT OUT OF OHIO? TRENDY FOR MADISON AVENUE IS A WAY OF LIFE FOR BUCKEYES.

LIFE HAS TAKEN ME ELSEWHERE. YET MY ROOTS AND THOSE OF MY FAMILY REMAIN FIRMLY BURIED IN THE RICH SOIL OF THIS GREAT STATE.

WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF OHIO. AND NEVER IS THAT MORE SO THAN ON A JOYOUS DAY LIKE THIS.

SO, COME LET'S SING OHIO'S PRAISE. AND NOT JUST FOR TODAY, BUT FOR EVERY DAY.